New cabins lodging Canyon campers

DEDICATION IS APRIL 18 — We’ll celebrate completion of the latest major building project at Canyon Camp, near Hinton, at 1 p.m. that Saturday. The Foundation Cabin, above, and the Paul & Ann Milburn Cabin already are welcoming lodgers. Plan to take a tour and enjoy hamburgers and hot dogs after the service. Turn to page 6.

$15.4 million links churches to bigger achievements

But Apportionment giving slips again

By HOLLY MCCRAY

The 505 churches of the Oklahoma Conference gave a total of $15,441,608 to the connectional work of the Church in 2014. That’s a 92.66 percent collection rate for Apportionments. These funds enabled a vast array of ministries, far exceeding what one United Methodist church can accomplish alone.

By giving 100 percent to all Apportionments, imagine how much more Oklahomans can accomplish for the glory of God in 2015:
• Equip more laypeople to become bivocational pastors and to be church youth leaders. (In 2014, the Academy for Youth/Children’s Workers educated 15 such leaders, and 19 people enrolled in the Part-Time Local-Pastors Academy.)
• Assist newly released inmates with re-entry into society through Criminal Justice & Mercy Ministries. (In 2014, CJAMM decreased the recidivism rate for its Exodus House graduates and expanded programming for New Day camps by adding mountain biking, rock climbing, etc.)
• Reach more people who don’t participate in church life through New People New Places grants to 24 churches.
• Grow more disciples in churches with fewer than 50 worshippers. (In 2014, “Living the Lord’s Prayer” regional events helped 285 people from 69 churches develop spiritual practices. In February 2015, about 150 youngsters attended Confirmation Retreats, which add to discipling by churches with few youth members.)
• Engage more young adults in the life of the Church. Oklahoma soon will have five Korean-language churches, and the Chinese student ministry at the University of Oklahoma.
• Recruit and educate clergy through the efforts of the Board of Ordained Ministry (BOM) by:
  • Providing resources to reach people of Asian heritage, especially through Edmond Chinese International UMC, Korean-language churches, and the Chinese student ministry at the University of Oklahoma.
  • Preparing 11 clergy to be ordained, and 18 to be commissioned as Provisional Members.
  • Awarding scholarships to 285 people from 69 churches.
  • Providing Continuing Education opportunities to more than 600 clergy, for a total of 7,215 hours of training.
• Equip more laypeople to become bivocational pastors and to be church youth leaders. (In 2014, the Academy for Youth/Children’s Workers educated 15 such leaders, and 19 people enrolled in the Part-Time Local-Pastors Academy.)
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  • Preparing 11 clergy to be ordained, and 18 to be commissioned as Provisional Members.
  • Awarding scholarships to 32 students at six seminaries.
  • Providing Growing Together resources to 502 churches.
  • Providing $16,600 in grants to 24 churches.
  • Providing resources to 163 churches.
  • Providing continuing education opportunities to more than 600 clergy, for a total of 7,215 hours of training.

Author’s message for Circle of Care kids:
dream, overcome, change

By HOLLY McCRAY

The monsters of Alton’s childhood weren’t imaginary ones lurking beneath his bed at night. Very real, they erupted any time of day.

They were his family and foster caregivers.

Alton Carter will tell his remarkable story of survival when he speaks April 17 at the Friends of Children Banquet for Circle of Care. Simultaneous evening events will be held in Tulsa and Oklahoma City.

Today Carter directs the youth ministries of Stillwater-First United Methodist Church. He is a husband and the father of two teen boys. He’s a graduate of Oklahoma State University.

When you learn about his early life, you want to cheer for the man he has become.

His mother, single, disappeared for days. Starving, Carter and his siblings would go dumpster-diving for food.

A nasty uncle forced the children to wrestle one another and to line up and drink alcohol.

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A nasty uncle forced the children to wrestle one another and to line up and drink alcohol.
A large toy frog is mascot this year for Oklahoma Conference United Methodist Women, rallying them to “Fully Rely On God (FROG): Leaping into UMW’s Future!”

The women already are jumping with joy (pun intended): total mission giving in 2014 reached $333,720.25. That exceeded the year’s Pledge to Mission of $295,000. The financial feat was announced when the Conference Leadership Team met March 7, at OKC-Cornerstone UMC.

Cindy Hull, Conference UMW president, provided this update.

• District UMW teams are working to make the transition from 12 to eight districts as of 2016. Each new district will organize at the Conference UMW Quadrennial Meeting on April 15-17, 2016, at the Cox Convention Center in Oklahoma City. The centerpiece of the eight-day program will offer Bible study, worship, break-out sessions, and hands-on mission projects. Directors and Program Advisory Group members for the next quadrennium will be elected.

• Info and registration for UMW events are on the website www.okumc.org/umw.

• District Officer Training will be Oct. 24 at Sunny Lane UMC in Del City.

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Cheerleading during the music-saturated program were Superintendent Tish Malloy at left, Bishop Robert Hayes Jr., and other

trumpeted the potential to further grow God’s kingdom as the Oklahoma Conference realigns in eight districts on June 1.

on Jan. 24. Historical reflections honored the devoted churches that have served Christ for decades. The conference also

your God, sets apart for you to worship Him.”

By BISHOP ROBERT HAYES JR.

(Deuteronomy 26:1-2, The Message)

No Man’s Land is God’s land

“Once you enter the land that God, your God, is giving you as an inheritance and take it over and settle down, you are to take some of all the first fruits of what you grow in the land that God, your God, is giving you, put them in a basket and go to the place God, your God, sets apart for you to worship Him.”

(Deuteronomy 26:1-2, The Message)

By BISHOP ROBERT HAYES JR.

Throughout the month of March, I have been visiting our United Methodist churches in far northwest Oklahoma, including those in the area commonly known as the Panhandle. I am surprised to learn many Oklahomans have never explored that part of our great state. You owe it to yourself to become better acquainted with this intriguing region.

History recounts the establishment of the Panhandle as part of Oklahoma Territory. In 1854, Kansas set its southern boundary at the 37th parallel; Texas found itself unable to advance northward because of the Missouri Compromise.

That left a narrow parcel of land — 167 miles long and only 34.5 miles wide — unclaimed by any state or territory.

Thus it was named No Man’s Land. It was crisscrossed by nomadic Plains Indians and cattle trail drives.

In the mid-1880s, drought caused people to leave their farmlands in western Kansas, and those settlers drifted south to this rugged sliver of the Plains. The area became part of Oklahoma Territory with the Organic Act of 1890.*

Methodists long have been part of this region’s history.

In February 1888, Mary Westmoreland Hitch and her sister petitioned the Methodist Mission Board in Kansas to send a preacher to Coldwater Creek, near what eventually became Guymon, Okla.

In her letter, Mary wrote, “We keenly feel the need of a spiritual shepherd and counselor, and even though we are 140 miles from the nearest railroad, our home will be the preacher’s home.”

Such was the tenacity of the people called Methodists 125 years ago. Their persistence in ministry remains alive and well today.

What has impressed me most as I’ve traveled this month is an undeniable truth: Our brothers and sisters in northwest Oklahoma possess an unshakable faith, deeply rooted in their love of God. They are strong and spirit-filled, trustworthy and courageous.

They have renewed my faith and revitalized my spirit!

Even in that once-overlooked place called No Man’s Land, I have found people of God holding on to the faith and traditions given to them by their grandparents and parents. In tiny towns and rural whistletops, surrounded by homesteads and farmlands, they praise God in beautiful houses of worship that were fashioned and built by their hands.

In my March visits to Woodward, Mooreland, Alva, Boise City, Kenton, Gate, Forgan, Beaver, and Fairview, I have discovered the harvest continues for Christ, sprouting from seeds of faith planted in 1889 by Rev. E.F. Reser — the first circuit-riding preacher who volunteered for this mission field, in response to Mary Hitch’s letter.

These trips echo my earlier visits to Catesby, Gage, Hardesty, Hooker, Laverne, Lenora, Seiling, Shattuck, Tyrone, and Vici.

I have experienced the blessing of tremendous hospitality. I saw genuine Christian love on faces, felt it in handshakes and hugs, heard the sincerity in the prayers and songs of the people called United Methodists!

And one spiritual practice I have witnessed in some rural congregations has moved me to tears.

Following the wheat harvest, church members bring bags of processed grain to the altar to be blessed.

It doesn’t matter if the harvest was plentiful or scarce. The farmers bring the firstfruits of their fields, and the pastor presents what is received as an offering to God.

Following the service, that wheat is used throughout the year to bake the bread for Holy Communion!

These United Methodists truly practice giving God the best of themselves and all they have. Now I know the secret to survival of the Christian witness in far northwest Oklahoma!

The unknown regions of the world in the late 1800s were represented on maps with mere words, such as “Demons be here!” and “Dragons and fiery scorpions dwell there!” But European mapmaker John Franklin systematically erased those words when he saw such maps, replacing those ominous statements with “Here be God!” and “There dwells God!”

God dwells in far northwest Oklahoma! Even in No Man’s Land, you will find God’s people, carrying forward the work of the ages, strong in the faith and true to the God who led them there.

PILLOW CASES FOR FOSTER KIDS — A united effort by children at several Tulsa-area churches created colorful travel bags from pillowcases for foster children served by the Circle of Care’s Child Share program. They used fabric markers to decorate some pillowcases and tie-dyed others. Rope was inserted to make a drawstring. The project was directed by children’s ministry directors at four churches: Verdigris, Jenks, Tulsa-Faith, and Tulsa-Boston Avenue. The directors meet monthly to share ideas and plans, said Ellen Wehn of Verdigris UMC. The bags were consecrated in worship before delivery to the Child Share office. Above: TV reporter Rick Wells interviews Skyler Yoder of Verdigris, left, and Sylvan McClure of Jenks while they work. At right: Ian Meador leads the Verdigris congregation in prayer; beside him, sister Maren said the “Amen.” Watch the news video on Tulsa Channel 6’s website.

Continued from page 1

Roaches not only infested places the family lived. At school, the insects crawled out of Carter’s clothes.


When he was 11, a desperate Carter ran away from home … and to DHS for help. That’s startling. News media seldom report that families ask the agency to intervene in their lives.

Carter, who turned to the state for shelter, was sent first to a juvenile detention center!

Years in foster care inflicted other terrors on the boy. A brutal man operated a group residence for boys, at a ranch.

Punishments included bear crawling, the man kicking those who struggled. Another form of his discipline: moving armoleds of bricks for two hours, with a quota required for that timeframe.

Despite all, this neglected, abused child held on to dreams of change. His siblings and cousins “grew hard,” Carter described. But he chose differently.

Actions by a few compassionate people helped him endure and then avoid the statistical expectations for a foster child in adulthood.

Carter describes those people in his book, “The Boy Who Carried Bricks” (The RoadRunner Press). This personal story is both unflinching and hopeful.

He writes of the “bread crumbs” of kindness that fed his spirit. Those nuggets nourished his dreams of a better life and helped him achieve it.

Today Carter tells his story to encourage others, both those suffering and those who can help.

“I want to help people find strength to overcome whatever (challenges) they face. I feel like I am making a difference for people who are hurting,” he said.

“Dream; realize you can overcome; change. It’s OK to ask for help. It takes all of that.”

As the church’s youth director, he builds relationships, “and through that you can talk about God,” he said.

“God will put people there to help you.”

The Circle of Care is among those. The support of Oklahoma United Methodists makes possible the help extended by that agency to hundreds of at-risk children and youths each year.

For information about the Circle of Care banquet: 405-530-2081, www.FOC.circleofcare.org. Carter’s life intersected with the Circle when a CoC official recently heard him speak to an audience in Ponca City.

(On March 13, “The Boy Who Carried Bricks” ranked No. 1 for Amazon in the category Teen & Young Adult Homelessness & Poverty Issues. A portion of sales goes to the Inspire Foundation.)

Ardmore welcomes CoC foster help

By MARSHA MILLER

The Ardmoreite

The numbers tell the story. According to data compiled Feb. 20 from Department of Human Services Child Welfare statistics, there are only 47 foster homes in Carter, Johnston, Love, Marshall, and Murray counties. That number is nowhere close to the number of children needing the safe and loving care of a foster home.

It’s a problem that blankets the entire state.

State Rep. Pat Ownbey of Ardmore said, “The answer in dealing with the thousands of children who need the support only a foster home can give isn’t found in government. It begins with people who sincerely want to be a part of the solution.”

Answering the call for a non-government solution is the Circle of Care, with its program called Child Share. Don Batson, president, said Child Share recruits, trains, and provides ongoing support to foster parents.

The nonprofit program began in Ardmore with a kick off family carnival Jan. 31.

Ardmore is the third city to have the program, which is expanding this year from Oklahoma City and Tulsa.

Child Share provides lots of assistance, from helping potential foster parents complete the application process without frustrating long waits and red tape, to long-term support.

“Getting these children into a loving home promptly is so very important to the child’s well-being. At the same time, these families must be ready for the challenges these children bring with them,” Ownbey said.

Contact a foster care recruiter:

- Oklahoma City: Angela Baker, 405-463-6626
  Angela.baker@circleofcare.org
- Tulsa: Andrea Wade, 918-794-3876
  Andrea.wade@circleofcare.org
- Shawnee: Patricia Collar, 405-693-7795
  Patricia.collar@circleofcare.org
- Stillwater: Julie Miller, 405-312-6640
  julie.miller@circleofcare.org
- Ardmore: Heather Doherty, 405-312-8663
  Heather.doherty@circleofcare.org
- Grove: Mark Westfall, 918-453-3503
  Mark.westfall@circleofcare.org
- Ponca City: Becky Hightower, 580-716-1625
  Rebecca.hightower@circleofcare.org
  Carlan Kindred, 580-789-0106
  Carlan.kindred@circleofcare.org

“My experience with this wonderful program is that this ministry offers great training and then stays beside these families by supporting them during the time the child is in the home.”

Child Share has opened an office at Ardmore’s First United Methodist Church.

“My family and I first became aware of the need for good foster homes about 4 1/2 years ago,” said Bebe Lodes. “Our daughter and son-in-law received an email from our minister about an 18-month-old little girl who needed emergency foster care. That little girl has been adopted and is now our grandchild.”

“From that point on, every article we read or news story we heard opened our eyes to the tremendous need for quality, Christian-based people who were willing to serve as foster parents.”

The program is open to all, not only United Methodist families.

“Our foster homes are diversified,” Batson added. “Couples can be approved. Singles can be approved, and there is no age requirement. Case management remains with DHS. “We provide a special support system.”

And Child Share is not only for potential foster parents in Ardmore.

“We return calls as soon as possible from people interested in the program, and within a 50-70 mile radius we try to be in the home in an hour to talk,” Batson said.

He encouraged those interested to talk with Child Share foster parents or staff. Civic and church groups can host question-and-answer sessions.

You can reach Ardmore’s Child Share family specialist, Heather Doherty, at First UMC, 580-223-5390.

(Reprinted with permission, The Ardmoreite, Feb. 22, 2015)
Lydia Patterson school erases barriers in students’ lives

By SAM HODGES
United Methodist News Service

Dayna Barrera seems typical of a bright, accomplished U.S. high school senior.

She’s filled one bedroom wall with inspirational slogans jotted on multi-colored sticky notes. Her nightstand holds books by John Green, a best-selling author of young adult novels.

But Barrera gets to class by leaving the country. Each weekday, she’s up before dawn to go from her home in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, into El Paso, Texas. There she attends Lydia Patterson Institute. This United Methodist high school is a ministry of the South Central Jurisdiction, which includes Oklahoma, and gets Apportionment support.

The journey takes 45 minutes on a good day. It means a standing-room-only ride on a city bus, a walk over the Rio Grande River via the Stanton Street Bridge, and shuffling through the pedestrian lane at the U.S. Customs and Border Protection port of entry.

“Sometimes they ask a lot of questions. Sometimes they don’t,” said Barrera, 18, in a March interview. “It depends on the officer.”

Whatever the hassle level, she arrives grateful. Barrera has a full scholarship offer from Ohio Wesleyan University and a large offer from the University of Texas at El Paso.

Overcoming poverty

For more than 100 years, Lydia Patterson Institute has been a beacon for young Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, giving them English language fluency and a sturdy, faith-based education that often brings transforming opportunities.

Juárez is a city beset by poverty and other social ills. But roughly 98 percent of the institute’s graduates go on to college, with the 2014 senior class attracting some $1.5 million in scholarships.

The alumni ranks boast physicians, lawyers, engineers, teachers, artists, diplomats — and United Methodist clergy, including retired Bishop Joel Martinez.

“We became more than just a school,” said Socorro Brito de Anda, president of Lydia Patterson. “We became a refuge, a safe haven for the students.”

These days, some 400 students attend the school, in grades seven through 12. Most of the younger students get intensive English language training, and all upper-grade classes are English only.

About 70 percent of the students make the daily trek from Juárez, with others coming from El Paso or other nearby U.S. communities. Of the Juárez group, some were born in the United States and have U.S. citizenship, while others are Mexican citizens and need a student visa to cross.

Many students are on financial aid. Scholarship students must work a campus job, an arrangement that allows the school to get by with a minimal support staff, including one maintenance man.

Bequer Gomez, an 18-year-old senior from Juárez, makes sure all restrooms have toilet paper. He’s happy to do any job that keeps him in the school.

“Lydia Patterson has become my home,” Gomez said. “It’s developed my leadership skills, my character.”

Gomez is one of about 50 students in the lay ministry internship program. That’s given him summer work at the Oklahoma Conference office in Oklahoma City and at Marvin UMC in Tyler, Texas.

Christian classes required

Four courses in Christian education are required, as well as weekly chapel attendance. Students also must wear uniforms and mind their manners.

“Grades and success are important to these kids,” said Alfredo Gurrola, who teaches science at Lydia Patterson Institute after 32 years teaching in the public schools.

By 6:30 a.m. each weekday, Dayna Barrera is out the door to travel from her home in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, to Lydia Patterson Institute in El Paso, Texas. She’s expected to be the school’s 2015 valedictorian. This portrait is in her home.

Photo by
Sam Hodges, UMNS

SWOSU campus ministry wins grant

A $12,000 grant from the denomination’s Young Clergy Initiative will make possible a new internship program by the Wesley Foundation at Southwestern Oklahoma State University in Weatherford.

The campus ministry at SWOSU will begin this new program with the first class of student interns in Fall 2015.

Every year churches contact United Methodist campus ministries in their search for energetic, thoughtful students to step into local-church leadership roles. Many call looking for youth directors, but others need help in children’s ministry or musical talent.

At times a perfect match results, but sometimes the college students find work in the church to be far different than expected, explained Elizabeth Horton-Ware.

Whether it is balancing school work and church schedules, the challenge of mentoring someone in the faith may burn out a college student who is still defining a personal understanding of God, still discerning that student’s role in God’s kingdom-ministry.

Rev. Horton-Ware said these were the thoughts behind the vision by the SWOSU Wesley Foundation for a new internship program. She is the Wesley Foundation director.

Student interns have long been part of this campus ministry, but the new format will require interns to serve 10 hours a week in local-church settings throughout the academic year.

The churches will provide mentors to guide the interns through their work in the congregations. In addition to that mentoring, interns will receive a weekend full of training and discernment. Monthly meetings will bring together all interns and the campus minister for training and group processing, with financial support throughout the process.

The $7 million Young Clergy Initiative Fund was created by the 2012 General Conference and is administered by the General Board of Higher Education & Ministry.

Then there’s Patricia Amador, who came from Juárez and graduated in 1965. She went to the University of Texas at El Paso, the first in her family to attend college.

“The Lord is using the United Methodist people to bless these children through education,” said Amador, who teaches math there.

President De Anda and Richard Hearne of Texas, development director, share a story they believe shows divine guidance in the school’s affairs.

Hearne had asked a UM pastor to commit his church to underwriting a scholarship. The pastor agreed, and an excited Hearne called de Anda. She surprised him by responding neutrally.

He learned later that, when he called, she had twin boys in her office, with their parents. They were a poor family, and the president didn’t want to ask the parents to choose which boy would attend on the one new scholarship.

The situation turned bleaker. The pastor phoned Hearne and backed off the commitment, saying he needed an OK from the church’s missions committee.

A few days later the pastor called with the committee’s decision.

“We’re not going to fund a scholarship,” he told Hearne. “We’re going to fund two.”

The pastor had not known about the twins’ need.

YOU ARE INVITED!
Friends of Children Banquet
Friday, April 17, 2015
6:30 p.m.

Please join us as we celebrate the mission, work, and impact of Oklahoma United Methodist Circle of Care.

Two Locations:
Oklahoma City
Quail Creek Country Club

Tulsa
Southern Hills Marriott

The presentation will be the same in both cities.

Using telecommunications technology, Circle of Care’s supporters across the state will be united on this evening of celebration and hope. The program will include testimonials from clients and 2014 ministry highlights!

Sponsorship opportunities: call 405-530-2081

• Statewide Sponsor
$10,000 – Two tables (8 seats each)
Name printed in both programs, program mention, and invitation to pre-event reception

• Table Sponsor
$1,000 – One table (8 seats)
Name printed in local program, and program mention

• Event Sponsor
$5,000 – One table (8 seats)
Name printed in local program, program mention, and invitation to pre-event reception

• Individual Dinner Reservation
$50 per person

RSVP at:
FOC.circleofcare.org
or 405-530-2081
By HOLLY McCRAY

The upcoming dedication of Canyon Camp’s new cabins, on April 18, confirms this is a milestone year for Oklahoma United Methodist camping ministries. You’re invited to the celebration.

More great moments to come:
• On June 1, Cross Point Camp will officially dedicate its two new cabins.
• Funds totaling $470,000 have been secured to build a medical station at Camp Egan.
• Ask Canyon’s manager, David Combs, to name his favorite part of that cabin project.
• His answer won’t be the building design or furnishings. He immediately acknowledges the many individuals and groups whose donations funded the construction and furnished the spaces.
• Some of them will attend that Saturday dedication ceremony, at 1 p.m. Then hamburgers and hot dogs will be served. The public is welcome. To assist meal planning, RSVP to the camp office, 405-542-6967, by April 13.
• On Jan. 1, the Paul & Ann Milburn Cabin and the Foundation Cabin opened their doors.

The first lodgers were a youth group from OKC-Church of the Servant and the young people attending a North/South Oklahoma City Districts’ program, according to Combs.

The new cabins are design twins. Their red exteriors match well with existing buildings.

At 3,000-plus square feet, each has a large central meeting room and two wings for lodging 30 people total.

In the meeting room, walls of windows at front and back admit lots of natural light. Six ceiling fans circulate air. A kitchenette provides refrigerator, microwave, sink, and plenty of electrical outlets.

In each wing, red bunks sleep 15 people, and the gleaming bathroom is outfitted with four mirrored sinks, four toilet stalls, and three showers. United Methodist Men of Lost Creek and Stillwater-First, directed by Tom Kirby, built the bunk beds.

Canyon Camp’s oldest buildings were constructed about 60 years ago.

According to Combs, “What can we build that will last another 60 years?” was a key question for trustees.

“The design is very well thought out,” Combs said.

The metal exterior is virtually maintenance-free, he said. The metal roofing will outlast shingles. Windows are double-pane.

Separate mechanical units heat and cool each wing. “You could have a group stay on just one side, and won’t need air or heat going in both,” Combs explained.

Access to the meeting room and two additional bathrooms is directly from outdoors. Guests don’t walk through the sleeping areas to reach them.

A tour of Canyon Camp reveals more improvements. An electric utility cooperative has built an emergency access road to the lighted cross atop the canyon walls. And soon a long, paved sidewalk will stretch beside much of the main camp road, on the grassy field side.

The United States Department of the Interior has designated Canyon as a National Natural Landmark. The church camp facility, southeast of Hinton, is about an hour’s drive west of Oklahoma City.

Canyon Camp’s landmark bell sits near the Paul & Ann Milburn Cabin. Through the big windows of the central meeting room, you’ll glimpse the red sandstone walls of the canyon rising behind the new building.

Sign-up begins for summertime camps, retreats

March served up Spring Break for Oklahoma schools … and that signified the summer church-camp season soon will follow.

It’s time to sign up your student for those faith-based adventures, June through July, offered by United Methodist Camp and Retreat Ministries.

The schedule this summer is built on the current 12-district structure of the Conference.

You can register for summer camp online, or use the forms printed in the separate booklets “Summer 2015 Youth Camps” and “Summer 2015 Children’s Camps.” Those two publications were sent by U.S. mail to churches, last summer’s campers, etc.

• A retooled website — www.ok-camps.org — directs you through online enrollment.
• District camp information is found on the final pages of the “Youth Camps” booklet.
• Both booklets include forms that must be completed, such as health information and CYME/JEM recommendations.
• Digital communication tools offer even more access to UM camping news: Facebook.com/OkCamps, Twitter.com/Ok_Camps, Instagram.com/Ok_Camps, and oklahomacamping@okumc.org.

Ed Parker, Camps executive director, said a committee chaired by Devon Krause of Elk City is developing plans for 2016, when an eight-district system will be in effect.

Parker said six characteristics “drive everything we do.” They are:
• safety (“That’s No. 1 with parents”);
• mature, well-trained staff;
• opportunities for skill development (Do you know the J-Stroke, a canoe technique?);
• building friendships;
• fun; and
• spiritual growth.

In the Camps office at the United Methodist Ministry Center, Oklahoma City, Katie Wonderly is registrar and Mary Seay is new administrative assistant.

The two new cabins are identical. Here are interior views. Light floods the central meeting space.

Bunks form an interesting pattern; each bed has a built-in storage shelf. Each shower stall is outfitted with two curtains, to separate washing and dressing spaces.
**The global church**

**Penalty for helping** — Courtney McHill couldn’t be prouder of her flock at McMinnville (Oregon) Cooperative Ministries for welcoming homeless people to camp there.

But the city of McMinnville, Ore., has had complaints and wants the homeless encampment closed by March 31.

If the church doesn’t meet the deadline, it will get a court summons. It could be fined up to $500 a day for violating ordinances that restrict temporary housing, according to the city manager.

Both sides say discussions are under way to avoid court.

Rev. McHill, a ULM elder, co-pastors the church, a joint effort of United Methodists and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

**Hotline busy** — In 2014, the Upper Room Living Prayer Center received 273,580 prayer requests. Many were received and answered by United Methodist Men volunteers.

For the third year in a row, Alabama West Florida Conference UM Men were the top contributors to the ministry, based in Nashville, Tenn. UM Men nationwide contributed $20,980, which enabled the ministry to respond to 2,400 prayer requests by e-mail; 39,593 requests at the website, and 231,287 by phone.

Call the Prayer Center, 800-251-2468, between 7 a.m. and 11 p.m. CDST.

**Coffee break outreach** — Bringing up God in casual conversation can be quite a challenge. Lakesha Groover and Andrew Ryoo came up with a way to try to make that less stressful.

They co-pastor Mosaic Ministries in three New Jersey cities. They handed their congregations $10 gift cards to Starbucks and Dunkin Donuts, asking the members to go out, meet people in coffee shops, and share beverages and conversation about God.

“We wanted to provide people a practical way of starting conversations about faith in the world,” Rev. Groover said.

**New small-group study recommended**

The popular small-group study “A Disciple’s Path,” by James Harnish, has been followed by a related resource, “A Disciple’s Heart,” by Harnish. It has been distributed $20,980, which enabled the ministry to respond to 2,400 prayer requests by e-mail; 39,593 requests at the website, and 231,287 by phone.

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**Game on** — On a sunny afternoon, women gather on the makeshift ball field that is the training area for the St. Peter’s UMC netball team.

“We have excelled in the sport since it was introduced in 2011 at the annual conference of the (Zimbabwe East Conference) women’s union,” Coach Tabitha Ruzvivio said. Netball, popular in many places outside the United States, is an offshoot of basketball.

Participation has not only encouraged the women to stay fit and healthy, but also has contributed to growth in St. Peter’s congregation.

**Denominations in discussions** — Baptists and Methodists seem the least likely to become entangled in theological disputes or battles over turf and members. Pulpit swaps and shared ministries are increasingly common.

But historically, the two traditions were often bitter rivals, said Bill Leonard, professor of Baptist studies and church history at Wake Forest University School of Divinity.

“They used to have debates on the frontier over infant baptism, falling from grace and, in the case of Calvinistic Baptists, whether Christ’s death on the cross was only for the elect,” Leonard said.

Representatives of the Baptist World Alliance and the World Methodist Council have met twice, with three more meetings planned.

**Social media tips** — Extend your church’s welcoming ministry online. Here are some suggestions.

1. Ask congregants to check-in or post to social media. Give them permission to share special moments or quotes on various social media platforms.

2. Create tweetable links to share.

3. Create tweetable quotes. Use a free service like Pulitzer or a 140-character quote into a Twitter image that is easily retweetable.

4. Make sharing easy on your site. The free service Share This generates a code that adds a sharing bar to the side of every page.

5. Make Instagrammable slides.

6. Post a teaser video.

7. Advertise hashtags and account names.

**Church trial** — In Longmont, Colo., a recent Church trial found clergyman Filimone Havili Mone guilty of disobeying the order and discipline of the Church, and his membership in the Rocky Mountain Conference was terminated. He retains his ordination in the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga.

Rev. Mone formerly pastored Tongan UMC, Salt Lake City, Utah. In 2012, concerns arose about suspected sexual abuse at that church. It was found that Mone had failed to report the abuse to authorities in a timely manner, in violation of church and state law.

In 2013, Mone was tried in city court and negotiated a plea for failing to report abuse of a child.

**Briefly**

Emily and Rachel Krogman dig at Hillcrest UMC, Nashville, Tenn. Seventy-five volunteers from the church and community planted 250 native trees as part of a Creation Care effort March 14. Earth Day is observed worldwide on April 22.

**Funds go to OIMC**

The Oklahoma Indian Missionary Conference (OIMC) has received a $3,300 Human Relations Day grant for a project titled “Honoring Us for Who We Are: Created by God.”

The OIMC advocacy project focuses on Native American mascot issues and the history of state-sponsored violence against Native Americans, according to information from the General Board of Church & Society (GBCS). Education on the United Methodist Social Principles will be one aspect of the work.

At its spring meeting, GBCS approved almost $120,000 in grants to UM ministries around the world.

Human Relations Day is one of six churchwide Special Sundays.

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Diana Northcutt, Conference director of Discipleship Ministries, said the first study invited participants to practice the spiritual disciplines by which we were formed into people who love God and love others.

“A Disciple’s Heart” builds on the foundation of those disciplines to lead Christians into a deeper experience of love and grace, she described.

“As in the first resource, we draw on the example of Benjamin Ingham, who joined a small group of fellow students at Oxford University in 1729 with John Wesley as their mentor. Ingham’s journal provides an intimate look at the life of the first Methodists and will be a guide for us along the way,” Rev. Northcutt recommended. “This is a great resource to follow up for churches that have completed ‘A Disciple’s Path.’”

**OCU won’t raise tuition**

Tuition and fees at Oklahoma City University will not increase for the 2015-16 academic year, President Robert Henry announced Feb. 5.

Undergraduate, graduate, and law school tuition and fees will remain flat.

Many financial aid opportunities exist at the United Methodist-related, private university. More than 90 percent of undergraduate students receive such assistance.

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The Foundation and the OKC Thunder partner for a life-saving cause

The Oklahoma United Methodist Foundation is once again partnering with the Oklahoma City Thunder basketball team to bring the OKC Thunder Nothing But Nets Night on Friday, April 10.

As the OKC Thunder take on the Sacramento Kings, Oklahoma United Methodists will take on the deadly disease malaria. When game tickets are purchased through the Foundation, a portion of the ticket price will go to Nothing But Nets. Each ticket purchased through the Foundation for the April 10 game will buy one life-saving bed net.

Game night tickets still are available for $41 or $53 and can be purchased by calling Barbara at the Foundation at 405-896-5003.

The game is an opportunity for church youth groups, Sunday school classes, UMM, UMW, and other groups to have a fun night out and support a worthy cause. Only a limited number of tickets is available.

Through ticket sales and other contributions, the Foundation raised more than $45,000 since the first Oklahoma City Thunder Nothing But Nets basketball game in 2011.

With the money raised, Nothing But Nets, an organization founded in part by The United Methodist Church, has provided more than 4,500 life-saving beds for children and families in developing countries, to prevent the deadly disease malaria, especially in Africa.

Nothing But Nets is supported by many organizations, including The United Methodist Church and the NBA. Visit www.nothingbutnets.net for more information.

If you are unable to attend the game, you can still contribute to Nothing But Nets through the Foundation. Call our office at 800-259-6863 or go online to www.okumf.org/services/onlinegiving.

Money: Continued from page 1

In January, Treasurer Brian Bake- man told the Council on Finance & Administration (CFA), “Most people think about Apportionments in the same light as operating budgets. It is usually easier to raise specific dollars for mission or special projects than it is for operating budgets.”

In a Contact interview, Tom Junk concurred. “These images are easier for people to get in their minds. It’s harder to paint the picture for what Conference administration does.”

However, “without administration and the structure of the Church, we don’t have the platform and mechanisms to respond when there is need.”

Junk chairs the CFA, and he has served about a year as a director of the General Board of Global Ministries, including the UMCOR emergency committee. This member of Tulsa-First Church sees directly how Apportionments support God’s work at all levels of the denomination.

Perhaps the examples in this story give some clarity to where Apportionment money goes in Oklahoma.

“I think as the successes of the New People New Places initiative become apparent to us, and as new disciples are made because of those projects, that our stewardship is going to be encouraged,” Junk said.

Bishop Robert Hayes Jr. consistently says “to finish strong” in all areas. At the January CFA meeting, he questioned the ongoing decline in Apportionment receipts.

“We’re affecting these wonderful ministries we have across the state,” said Rev. Bakeman.

Several ministries, including Circle of Care and Cookson Hills Center, typically receive more than 100 percent of their Apportionment requests. But even those receipts fell in 2014.

Circle of Care Apportionment support slide below 93 percent, missing the agency’s $700,000 budget by about $49,200. Receipts for the Oklahoma City University Apportionment were reported at 85 percent, leaving a budget hole of $145,291.

Annual Conference delegates approved a lower Conference budget for 2014, which in turn lowered the total Apportionments requested from churches ($16,663,047). And among Oklahoma’s 30 largest churches, based on their assigned Apportionments, all but four gave 100 percent that year.

Still, the overall 92.66 percent collection rate — $1.2 million less from all churches — was the lowest in 10 years.

(Statistics provided by Adam Leathers, CJAMM director; Terri Bryant, director of Discipleship; Sarah Nichols, director of Young Adult Mission & Service Project Transformation; and Chuck Nordam, director of Clergy & Congregational Development)